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Citation for final published version:

Baillie, Jessica ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4592-7286> 2019.
Commentary: Service user involvement in teaching and learning: student nurse perspectives. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 24 (3-4) , pp. 195-196.
10.1177/1744987119837802 file

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1744987119837802>
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1744987119837802>>

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Review Service user involvement in teaching and learning: Student nurse perspectives

Jessica Baillie BN PhD RN FHEA

School of Healthcare Sciences, Cardiff University, UK

It is now commonplace to involve service users as partners in healthcare, including designing health services, co-producing research studies and teaching undergraduate students. This is vital to ensure that services and research studies reflect the experiences and preferences of patients and their families. As a preregistration student nurse, the sessions I remember most keenly are those that evolved around the experiences of patients and their families, particularly when patients participated in classroom sessions.

This interesting paper evaluates an initiative at a UK university, where service users were involved in teaching undergraduate nursing students, using a coaching approach. Their Patient as Coach Team (PaCT) sessions focused on the English Department of Health's 6 Cs (DH, 2012), with service users leading a discussion around their experience of healthcare. The evaluation involved a structured survey completed by 321 student nurses, with 170 respondents also completing free-text comment boxes. While this study was single-centre, there is a large sample with collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The evaluation identified that students felt overwhelmingly positive about the PaCT initiative, with 98% of students reporting satisfaction with the sessions. Crucially, 99% of students either agreed or strongly agreed that they would apply their learning to their future practice, although whether students went on to do so is not included in the paper. The authors generated five themes from the free text data:

1. Usefulness of session: students used very positive language to describe the sessions, valued listening to service users' experiences and explained that the initiative would be beneficial to their future practice.
2. Seeing the patient's perspective: the sessions were valuable to students and reportedly helped them to empathise with patients.
3. Inspiring and motivating session: the students felt the sessions increased their confidence and courage, which they would take forward into clinical practice.
4. Good discussions with Patient Coach: the sessions encouraged experiential learning through the sharing of experiences between the Patient Coach and students.
5. Overall views about the PaCT session: students found the sessions very positive and appreciated learning directly from patients.

The authors report that students felt being in small groups for the PaCT sessions was beneficial. Small group work can be challenging in some preregistration nursing programmes in the UK where cohort sizes are large and learning spaces are at a premium. Furthermore, students described that having additional time for the sessions would have been helpful; again, preregistration nursing programmes may struggle to accommodate longer service user sessions due to overly full timetables.

The study authors acknowledge that they did not explore the perspectives of academic staff, nor those of service users sharing their experiences with undergraduate student nurses. In a project I was involved in, people who had cancer (or their carers) shared their experiences with small groups of student nurses. In our evaluation we interviewed a range of stakeholders (including a carer, senior clinical nurses and nurse academics) and all viewed service users contributing to the undergraduate programme positively (Edwards et al. 2017). As academics we found that it was vital to ensure service users felt prepared and supported to contribute to teaching, including debriefing following the sessions. The authors refer to a further phase of the PaCT project, which will include service users' perspectives, and this will certainly enhance the overall evaluation.

Jessica Baillie is a lecturer in adult nursing and RCBC Wales Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Cardiff University. She has worked with patients, carers and members of the public to co-produce research studies and teach undergraduate students.

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